

# Occupational Safety and Health

## Office Safety

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### **I. Office-Related Illness and Injury**

Changes have occurred in the American workplace as a result of the new office technology and automation of office equipment. As with all new technology, these changes bring with it a set of health and safety concerns. In addition to obvious hazards such as slippery floors or an open file drawer, a modern office may also contain hazards such as, poor lighting, noise, poorly designed furniture, and equipment and machines that emit gases and vapors when not properly maintained. Even the nature of office work itself has produced a whole host of stress-related symptoms and musculoskeletal strains. For example, long hours at a poorly designed computer workstation can cause pains in the neck and back, shoulders, lower extremities, arms, wrists, hands, eyestrain, and a general feeling of tension and irritability. The leading types of disabling accidents that occur within the office are the result of falls, strains and overexertions, falling objects, striking against objects, and being caught in or between objects.

#### **Falls**

Falls are the most common office accident, accounting for the greatest number of disabling injuries. The disabling injury rate of falls among office workers is 2 to 2.5 times higher than the rate for non-office employees. A fall occurs when you lose your balance and footing. One of the most common causes of office falls is tripping over an open desk or file drawer. Bending while seated in an unstable chair and tripping over electrical cords or wires are other common hazards. Office falls are frequently caused by slipping on wet floors or using a chair or stack of boxes in place of a ladder. Loose carpeting, objects stored in halls or walkways, and inadequate lighting are other hazards that

invite accidental falls. Fortunately, all of these fall hazards are preventable. The following checklist can help stop a fall before it happens.

- Be sure the pathway is clear before you walk.
- Close drawers completely after every use.
- Avoid excessive bending, twisting, and leaning backward while seated.
- Secure electrical cords and wires away from walkways.
- Always use a stepladder for overhead reaching. Chairs should never be used as ladders.
- Clean up or report spills immediately.
- Pick up objects co-workers may have left on the floor.
- Report loose carpeting or damaged flooring.
- Never carry anything that obscures your vision.
- Wear stable shoes with non-slip soles.

If you find yourself heading for a fall, remember to **roll, don't reach**. By letting your body crumple and roll, you are more likely to absorb the impact and momentum of a fall without injury. Reaching out an arm or leg to break your fall may result in a broken limb instead.

#### **B. Strains and Overexertion**

Although a typical office job may not involve lifting large or especially heavy objects, it's important to follow the principles of safe lifting. Small, light loads (i.e., stacks of files, boxes of computer paper, books) can wreak havoc on your back, neck, and shoulders if you use your body incorrectly when you lift them. Backs are especially vulnerable; most back injuries result from improper lifting. Before you pick up a carton or load, ask yourself these questions:

Is this too heavy for me to lift and carry alone?

How high do I have to lift it?

How far do I have to carry it?

Am I trying to impress anyone by lifting this?

If you feel that the lift is beyond your ability, contact your supervisor or ask another employee to assist you.

#### **Safe Lifting Steps**

1. Take a balanced stance, feet placed shoulder-width apart. When lifting something from the floor, squat close to the load.

2. Keep your back in its neutral or straight position. Tuck in your chin so your head and neck continue the straight back line.
3. Grip the object with your whole hand, rather than only with your fingers.
4. Draw the object close to you, holding your elbows close to your body to keep the load and your body weight centered.
5. Lift by straightening your legs. Let your leg muscles, not your back muscles, do the work. Tighten your stomach muscles to help support your back.
6. Maintain your neutral back position as you lift.
7. Never twist when lifting. When you must turn with a load, turn your whole body, feet first.
8. Never carry a load that blocks your vision.
9. To set something down, use the same body mechanics designed for lifting.

### **Lifting from a Seated Position**

Bending from a seated position and coming back up places tremendous strain on your back. Also, your chair could be unstable and slip out from under you. Instead, stand and move your chair out of the way. Squat and stand whenever you have to retrieve something from the floor.

### **Ergonomic Solutions to Backbreaking Tasks**

- If you are doing a lot of twisting while lifting, try to rearrange the space to avoid this. People who have to twist under a load are more likely to suffer back injury.
- Rotate through tasks so that periods of standing alternate with moving or sitting. Ask for stools or footrests for stationary jobs.
- Store materials at knee level whenever possible instead of on the floor.
- Make shelves shallower (12-18") so one does not have to reach forward to lift the object.
- Break up loads so each weighs less. If you must carry a heavy object some distance, consider storing it closer, request a table to rest it on, or try to use a hand truck or cart to transport it.

### **Struck By or Striking Objects**

Striking against objects is another cause of office injuries. Incidents of this type include:

Bumping into doors, desks, file cabinets, and open drawers.

Bumping into other people while walking.

Striking open file drawers while bending down or straightening up.

Striking against sharp objects such as office machines, spindle files, staples, and pins.

Pay attention to where you are walking at all times, properly store materials in your work area and never carry objects that prevent you from seeing ahead of you.

Objects striking employees occur as a result of:

Office supplies sliding from shelves or cabinet tops.

Overbalanced file cabinets in which two or more drawers were opened at the same time or in which the file drawer was pulled out too far.

Machines, such as computers or monitors that were dropped on feet.

Doors that were opened suddenly from the other side.

Proper material storage and use of storage devices can avoid these accidents.

### **Caught In or Between Objects**

The last category of leading disabling incidents occurs as a result of office workers who get their fingers or articles of clothing caught in or between objects. Office workers may be injured as a result of:

Fingers caught in a drawer, door, or window.

Fingers, hair or articles of clothing and jewelry caught in office machines.

Fingers caught under the blade of a paper cutter.

While working on office equipment, concentrate on what you are doing.

### **Material Storage**

Improperly stored office materials can lead to objects falling on workers, poor visibility, and create a fire hazard. A good housekeeping program will reduce or eliminate hazards associated with improper storage of materials. Examples of improper storage include unstable piling, piling materials too high, and obstructing doors, aisles, fire exits and fire-fighting equipment. The following are good storage practices:

Boxes, papers, and other materials should not be stored on top of lockers or file cabinets because they can cause sliding problems. Boxes and cartons should all be of uniform size in any pile or stack. Always stack material in such a way that it will not fall over.

Store heavy objects on lower shelves.

Try to store materials inside cabinets, files, and lockers.

Office equipment such as computers, monitors, index files, lights or calculators should not be placed on the edges of a desk, filing cabinet, or table.

Aisles, corners, and passageways must remain unobstructed. There should be no stacking of materials in these areas.

Storage areas should be designated and used only for that purpose.

Store heavy materials so you do not have to reach across something to retrieve them.

Fire equipment, extinguishers, fire door exits, and sprinkler heads should remain unobstructed. Materials should be at least 18 inches minimum away from sprinkler heads.

## **II. Workstation Ergonomics**

Ergonomics means fitting the workplace to the workers by modifying or redesigning the job, workstation, tool or environment. Workstation design can have a significant impact on office workers health and well-being. There are a multitude of discomforts, which can result from ergonomically incorrect computer workstation setups. The most common complaints relate to the neck, shoulders, and back. Others concern the arms and hands and occasionally the eyes. For example, poorly designed chairs and/or bad postures can cause lower back strain; or a chair that is too high can cause circulation loss in the legs and feet. Certain common characteristics of computer workstation tasks have been

identified and associated with increased risk of musculoskeletal problems. These include:

- Design of the workstation
- Nature of the task
- Repetitiveness of the job
- Degree of postural constraint
- Work pace
- Work/rest schedules
- Personal attributes of individual workers

The key to comfort is in maintaining the body in a relaxed, neutral position. The ideal work position is to have the arms hanging relaxed from the shoulders. If a keyboard is used, arms should be bent at right angles at the elbow, with the hands held in a straight line with forearms and elbows close to the body. The head should be in line with the body and slightly forward.

### **Arranging Your Workstation to Fit You**

1. Adjust the height of the chair's seat such that the thighs are horizontal while the feet are flat on the floor.
2. Adjust the seat pan depth such that your back is supported by the chair back rest while the back of the knee is comfortable relative to the front of the seat.
3. Adjust the back rest vertically so that it supports/fits the curvature of your lower back.
4. With the arms at your sides and the elbow joint approximately 90 degrees, adjust the height/position of the chair armrests to support the forearms.
5. Adjust the height of the keyboard such that the fingers rest on the keyboard home row when the arm is to the side, elbow at 90 degrees, and the wrist straight.
6. Place the mouse, trackball, or special keypads, next to the keyboard tray. Keep the wrist in a neutral position with the arm and hand close to the body.
7. Adjust the height of the monitor such that the top of the screen is at eye level. If bifocals/trifocals are used, place the monitor at a height that allows easy viewing without tipping the head back.

8. Place reference documents on a document holder close to the screen and at the same distance from the eye.

A footrest may be necessary if the operator cannot rest his/her feet comfortably on the floor.

### **Applying Good Work Practices**

The way a task is performed and the workstation environment it is performed in can influence the risk of injury and general work productivity. Good technique can make a job easy and safe to accomplish. Good work practices include

- Adjusting the drapes or blinds.
- Moving the monitor away from sources of glare or direct light.
- Tipping the monitor slightly downward.
- Using diffusers on overhead lighting.
- Placing an anti-glare filter on the screen.
- Clean the monitor screen on a regular basis
- Avoid cradling the telephone between the head and shoulder. Hold the phone with your hand, use the speaker phone, or a headset.
- Keep frequently used items like the telephone, reference materials, and pens/pencils within easy reach.
- Position the monitor and keyboard directly in front of the user.
- Move between different postures regularly.
- Apply task lighting as to your needs.
- Use the minimum force necessary to strike the keyboard/ten-key keys.
- Use the minimum force necessary to activate the hole punch and stapler.
- Vary your tasks to avoid a long period of one activity.
- Take mini-breaks to rest the eyes and muscles. A break does not have to be a stop of work duties. However, it should be a different style of physical activity such as changing from keyboarding to using the telephone or filing.
- Neutralize distracting noise by using ear plugs, playing soft music, or turning on a fan.

- Maintain a comfortable workplace temperature by using layers of clothing or a fan.

### **III. Indoor Air Quality and Ventilation**

Indoor air quality (IAQ) is an increasingly important issue in the work environment. The study of indoor air quality and pollutant levels within office environments is a complex problem. The complexity of studying and measuring the quality of office environments arises from various factors including:

1. Office building floor plans are frequently changing to accommodate increasingly more employees and reorganization.
2. Office buildings frequently undergo building renovations such as installation of new carpet, modular office partitions and freestanding offices, and painting.
3. Many of the health symptoms appearing are vague and common both to the office and home environment.
4. Guidelines or standards for permissible personal exposure limits to pollutants within office buildings are very limited.

Many times odors are associated with chemical contaminants from inside or outside the office space, or from the building fabric. This is particularly noticeable following building renovation or installation of new carpeting. Out-gassing from such things as paints, adhesives, sealants, office furniture, carpeting, and vinyl wall coverings is the source of a variety of irritant compounds. In most cases, these chemical contaminants can be measured at levels above ambient (normal background) but are far below any existing occupational evaluation criteria.

The National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) has conducted hundreds of building studies which indicate that the most likely sources of IAQ complaints are poor ventilation, poor thermal conditions (too hot or too cold), relative humidity (too high or too low), poor ergonomic layout



of office space, emissions from office machines, copiers, and other building contaminants.

### **Overview of Ventilation Design**

Air enters office buildings or spaces through both mechanical ventilation systems as well as naturally through leaks around windows, doors, etc. Newer, larger buildings that are highly energy efficient due to sealed windows and heavy insulation primarily depend on mechanical ventilation. Older, smaller, and low occupancy office buildings can be adequately ventilated through natural sources which include air leakage through opened windows and doors, as well as through cracks in the windows and walls, and other openings. In a modern office building, the heating ventilation and air conditioning system (HVAC) is designed to keep occupants comfortable and healthy by controlling the amount of outside air that is added to the building atmosphere, filtering both incoming and recirculated air to remove particulates and controlling the temperature. The HVAC system includes all heating, cooling, and ventilation equipment serving a building including furnaces or boilers, chillers, cooling towers, air handling units, exhaust fans, ductwork, filters, steam (or heating water) piping. A ventilation system consists of a blower to move the air, ductwork to deliver air to the room, and vents to distribute the air. A good ventilation design will distribute supply air uniformly to each area and especially areas with office machines. An effectively designed area will not have the supply and exhaust vent too close together because fresh air may be removed before it is adequately distributed throughout the area. Exhaust fans are often located a significant distance away from supply vents. A simple way to determine if the ventilation system is running or if a vent is a supply or exhaust is to hold a tissue near the vent. If the tissue moves, the air is being circulated and the direction the tissue is blown will determine the type of vent. The American Society of Heating, Refrigeration, and Air Conditioning Engineers (ASHRAE) has established a general guideline of 20 cubic feet of outside air per minute/per person for an office environment. This is a sufficient amount of air to dilute building contaminants and maintain a healthy environment. Indoor air quality complaints increase significantly in offices that are not supplied sufficient outside air.

### **Environmental Parameters**

A ventilation system should provide for a comfortable environment with respect to humidity and temperature. The overall goal of climate control is to provide an environment that is not too cold, hot, dry or humid, and that is free from drafts and odors. Humidity refers to the amount of moisture in the air and extremes in humidification levels can influence how comfortable you may be.

When the air is too humid, it makes people feel uncomfortable (wet, clammy) and can promote mold growth. On the other hand, low humidity conditions (which typically occur in the winter months) dry out the nasal and respiratory passages. Static electricity problems (affecting hair and clothes, particularly synthetic fibers) are good indicators of an office with low relative humidity.

Excessively high or low temperatures in an office area can also lead to symptoms in building occupants and reduce productivity. High temperatures have been associated with fatigue, lassitude, irritability, headache and decrease in performance, coordination and alertness. A number of factors interact to determine whether people are comfortable with the temperature of the indoor air. The activity level, age, and physiology of each person affect the thermal comfort requirements of that individual. Extreme heat, which is unlikely to be found in an office environment, can result in heat rash, exhaustion, and fainting. Workers who may be less alert or fatigued from a high temperature environment may be more prone to accidents. Likewise, if the environment is too cold, flexibility, dexterity, and judgment may be impaired and therefore accidents may increase.

The American Society of Heating, Refrigeration and Air Conditioning Engineers (ASHRAE) has published guidelines for maintaining comfortable and productive work environments. According to ASHRAE, these temperature ranges represent the environmental conditions which 80% of the building occupants consider comfortable. ASHRAE recommends the following temperature and humidity ranges for office work:

Relative Humidity	Winter Temperature Range	Summer Temperature Range
30%	68.5 - 76.0 F	74.0 - 80.0 F
40%	68.5 - 75.5 F	73.5 - 79.5 F
50%	68.5 - 74.5 F	73.0 - 79.0 F
60%	68.0 - 74.0 F	72.5 - 78.0 F

Note: Relative humidity above 50% is not recommended because it can promote mold growth.

### **Indoor Air Pollution**

An inadequately ventilated office environment or a poorly designed ventilation system can lead to the build up of a variety of indoor air pollutants. Air pollutants can originate within the building or be drawn in from outdoors. Examples of sources that originate outside a building include: (1) pollen, dust and fungal spores; (2) general vehicle exhaust; (3) odors from dumpsters; and (4) re-entrained exhaust from the building itself or from neighboring buildings. Examples of sources that originate from within the building include: (1) building components and furnishings; (2) smoking; (3) maintenance or remodeling activities (painting, etc.); (4) housekeeping activities; (5) unsanitary conditions (standing water from clogged drains or dry traps) and water damage; and (6) emissions from office equipment or special use areas (print shops, laboratories, or food preparation areas).

### **Controls to Prevent Indoor Air Pollution**

The following recommendations and guidelines are useful in preventing indoor air quality problems:

1. HVAC systems should receive periodic cleaning and filters should be changed on a regular basis on all ventilation systems.
2. The ventilation system should introduce an adequate supply of fresh outside air into the office and capture and vent point air pollutant sources to the outside.
3. Office machinery should be operated in well-ventilated areas. Most office machinery does not require local exhaust ventilation in areas that are already provided with 7-10 air changes per hour. Photocopiers should be placed away from workers' desks. Workers should vary work tasks to avoid using machines excessively.
4. Office equipment should be cleaned/maintained according to the manufacturer's recommendations. Properly maintained equipment will not generate unhealthy levels of pollutants.
5. Attention should be given to special operations that may generate air contaminants (such as painting, pesticide spraying, and heavy cleaning). Provisions

for adequate ventilation must be made during these operations or other procedures must be utilized, such as performing work off-hours or removing employees from the immediate area.

### **Evaluation**

In order to determine if a possible relationship between any adverse health symptoms and indoor air quality exist, an industrial hygienist can conduct an indoor air quality survey. This survey will consist of an in-depth interview of complainants, an evaluation of potential sources of pollutants, a measurement program that involves selecting appropriate instrumentation and designing the monitoring effort, and, finally, an interpretation of the data gathered. In many situations, the cause of the inadequate indoor air quality can be recognized and certain mitigation measures suggested and/or implemented.

### **Lighting**

Lighting is one of the most important factors affecting personal comfort on the job. The best lighting system is one in which the light level is geared to the task, where brightness ratios are controlled (no intensely bright or dark areas in one field of vision) and where ceilings, walls, and floors are carefully chosen to minimize glare. Glare is defined as a harsh, uncomfortable bright light that shines directly in the eyes. Glare may be direct, coming from lights or sunshine, or indirect, coming from a reflected surface.

Different tasks require different levels of lighting. Areas in which intricate work is performed, for example, require greater illumination than warehouses. Lighting needs vary from time to time and person to person as well. One approach is to use adjustable task lighting that can provide needed illumination without increasing general lighting.

Vision problems are one of the leading sources of complaints among office workers. Poor office lighting can cause eyestrain and irritation, fatigue, double vision, watering and reddening of the eyelids, and a decrease in the power of focus and visual acuity. Headaches as well as neck and back pains may occur as a result of workers straining to see small or detailed items. Poor lighting in the workplace is also associated with an increase in accidents. Direct and reflected glare and shadows as well as delayed eye adaptation when moving from bright surroundings into dark ones (or vice versa) may prevent an employee from seeing tripping and other similar hazards.

There are a number of measures that can be used to prevent and control poor lighting conditions in the work environment:

1. Regular maintenance of the lighting system should be carried out to clean or replace old bulbs and faulty lamp circuits.
2. A light-colored matte finish on walls, ceilings, and floors to reduce glare is recommended by the Illuminating Engineering Society.
3. Whenever possible, office workers should not face windows, unshielded lamps, or other sources of glare.
4. Adjustable shades should be used if workers face a window.
5. Diffused light will help reduce shadows. Indirect lighting and task lighting are recommended, especially when dividers separate workspaces.
6. Task lamps are very effective in supplementing general office lighting for those who require or prefer additional lighting. Some task lamps permit several light levels.

#### **IV. Noise**

Noise can be defined very simply as unwanted sound. Office workers are subjected to many noise sources including video display terminals, high-speed printers, telephones, fax machines, and human voices. Noise can produce tension and stress as well as damage to hearing at high noise levels. For noise levels in offices, the most common effects are interference with speech communication, annoyance, and distraction from mental activities. The annoying effect of noise can decrease performance or increase errors in some task situations. If the tasks require a great deal of mental concentration, noise can be detrimental to performance.

Government standards have specific limits for exposure to noise to prevent hearing loss in employees. The level of noise one can safely be exposed to is dependent on the intensity of the noise as well as the duration of exposure. In an office setting the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) noise standards are rarely approached or exceeded. However, problems could

arise in areas with a high concentration of noisy machines, such as high-speed printers or copying machines.

When employees are subjected to sound levels exceeding OSHA standards, feasible administrative or engineering controls must be utilized. If such controls fail to reduce sound levels, personal protective equipment must be provided and used to reduce sound levels.

For many of the annoying sounds in the office environment, the following measures are useful for reducing the level of noise or its effects:

1. Select the quietest equipment possible. When there is a choice between two or more products, sound levels should be included as a consideration for purchase and use.
2. Provide for proper maintenance of equipment, such as lubrication and tightening of loose parts that can cause noise.
3. Locate loud equipment in areas where its effects are less detrimental. For example, place impact printers away from areas where people must use the phone.
4. Use barrier walls or dividers to isolate noise sources. Use of buffers or acoustically-treated materials can absorb noise that might otherwise travel further. Rubber pads to insulate vibrating equipment can also help to reduce noise.
5. Enclose equipment, such as printers, with acoustical covers or housings.
6. Schedule noisy tasks at times when it will have less of an effect on the other tasks in the office.

## **V. Office Electrical Safety**

Electricity is essential to the operations of a modern automated office as a source of power. Electrical equipment used in an office is potentially

hazardous and can cause serious shock and burn injuries if improperly used or maintained.

Electricity travels through electrical conductors, which may be in the form of wires or parts of the human body. Most metals and moist skin offer very little resistance to the flow of electrical current and can easily conduct electricity. Other substances such as dry wood, porcelain, or pottery offer a high resistance and can be used to prevent the flow of electrical current. If a part of the body comes in contact with the electrical circuit, a shock will occur. The electrical current will enter the body at one point and leave at another. The passage of electricity through the body can cause great pain, burns, destruction of tissue, nerves, and muscles and even death. Factors influencing the effects of electrical shock include the type of current, voltage, resistance, amperage, pathway through body, and the duration of contact. The longer the current flows through the body, the more serious the injury. Injuries are less severe when the current does not pass through or near nerve centers and vital organs. Electrical accidents usually occur as a result of faulty or defective equipment, unsafe installation, or misuse of equipment on the part of office workers. Types of electrical hazards found in an office environment include the following:

### **Ungrounded Equipment**

Grounding is a method of protecting employees from electric shock. By grounding an electrical system, a low-resistance path to earth through a ground connection is intentionally created. When properly done, this path offers sufficiently low resistance and has sufficient current-carrying capacity to prevent the build-up of hazardous voltages. Most fixed equipment such as large, stationary machines must be grounded. Cord and plug connected equipment must be grounded if it is located in hazardous or wet locations, if operated at more than 150 volts to ground, or if it is of a certain type of equipment (such as refrigerators and air conditioners). Smaller office equipment, such as typewriters and coffee pots, would generally not fall into these categories and therefore would not have to be grounded. However newer office equipment is manufactured with grounded plugs as a precaution (three prong plugs). This equipment should be used in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions. In any case, never remove the third (grounding) prong from any three-prong piece of equipment.

### **Overloaded Outlets**

Insufficient or overloading of electrical outlets should be avoided. A sufficient number of outlets will eliminate the need for extension cords. Overloading electrical circuits and extension cords can result in a fire. Floor mounted outlets should be carefully placed to prevent tripping hazards.

### **Unsafe/Non-Approved Equipment**

The use of poorly maintained or unsafe, poor quality, non-approved (by national testing laboratory) coffee makers, radios, lamps, etc. (often provided by or used by employees) should be prohibited. Such appliances can develop electrical shorts creating fire and/or shock hazards. Equipment and cords should be inspected regularly, and a qualified individual should make repairs.

### **Defective, frayed or improperly installed cords for electrically-operated office equipment**

When the outer jacket of a cord is damaged, the cord may no longer be water-resistant. The insulation can absorb moisture, which may then result in a short circuit or excessive current leakage to ground. If wires are exposed, they may cause a shock to a worker who contacts them. These cords should be replaced. Electric cords should be examined on a routine basis for fraying and exposed wiring.

### **Improper Placement of Cords**

A cord should not be pulled or dragged over nails, hooks, or other sharp objects that may cause cuts in the insulation. In addition, cords should never be placed on radiators, steam pipes, walls, and windows. Particular attention should be placed on connections behind furniture, since files and bookcases may be pushed tightly against electric outlets, severely bending the cord at the plug.

### **Electrical Cords across Walkways and Work Areas**

An adequate number of outlet sockets should be provided. Extension cords should only be used in situations where fixed wiring is not feasible and even then only on a temporary basis until permanent wiring can be installed. If it is necessary to use an extension cord, never run it across walkways or aisles due to the potential tripping hazard. If you must run a cord across a walkway, either tape it down or purchase a cord runner.



## **Live Parts Unguarded**

Wall receptacles should be designed and installed so that no current-carrying parts will be exposed, and outlet plates should be kept tight to eliminate the possibility of shock.

## **Pulling of Plugs to Shut Off Power**

Switches to turn on and off equipment should be provided, either in the equipment or in the cords, so that it is not necessary to pull the plugs to shut off the power. To remove a plug from an outlet, take a firm grip on and pull the plug itself. Never pull a plug out by the cord.

## **Working on "Live Equipment"**

Disconnect electrical machines before cleaning, adjusting, or applying flammable solutions. If a guard is removed to clean or repair parts, replace it before testing the equipment and returning the machine to service.

## **Blocking Electrical Panel Doors**

If an electrical malfunction should occur, the panel door, and anything else in front of the door will become very hot. Electrical panel doors should always be kept closed, to prevent "electrical flashover" in the event of an electrical malfunction.

## **VI. Office Fire Prevention Strategies**

The best time to think about fire safety is before a fire starts. Learn the location of fire escape routes and how to activate the fire alarm. Participate in practice fire drills on a regular basis. Become familiar with stairway exits because elevators will not function during a fire.

1. Heat-producing equipment such as copiers, lamps, coffee makers and hot plates are often overlooked as a potential fire hazard. Keep them away from anything that might burn.

2. Electrical appliances can be fire hazards. Be sure to turn off all appliances at the end of the day. Use only grounded appliances plugged into grounded outlets (three prong plug).
3. If electrical equipment malfunctions or gives off a strange odor, disconnect it and call the appropriate maintenance personnel. Promptly disconnect and replace cracked, frayed, or broken electrical cords.
4. Keep extension cords clear of doorways and other areas where they can be stepped on or chafed and never plug one extension cord into another.
5. Do not allow combustible material (boxes, paper, etc.) to build up in inappropriate storage locations (near sources of ignition).

Through a program of scheduled inspections, unsafe conditions can be recognized and corrected before they lead to serious injuries. Take a few moments each day to walk through your work area. Look for items previously pointed out, such as objects protruding into walkways, file cabinets that are weighted toward the top or frayed electrical cords. Advise personnel in the area of the hazards and set about correcting them.